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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 004894

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR GNEHM DISCUSSES U.S.-GOJ ISSUES WITH
NEW SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT

REF: A. AMMAN4408 B. AMMAN 4533 C. AMMAN 4577 D.
AMMAN 4246 E. AMMAN 4764

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Ambassador Gnehm visited newly elected Speaker of the Parliament, Saad Hayel Srour, and discussed issues related to the new Parliament including the ongoing debate on temporary laws, Iraq, and the peace process and U.S.-Jordanian relations. END SUMMARY.

INITIAL PRAISE FOR MPs

2. (C) On Saturday, August 2, Ambassador Gnehm and PolOff paid a courtesy call on the newly elected Speaker of the Parliament, Saad Hayel Srour. After an initial exchange of pleasantries, the Ambassador asked Srour about his views on the new Parliament. Srour confided that although the start of the special session had not been easy, things were going well and he was happy with the overall level of cooperation from members. He explained that only 20 percent of the new members were from the old parliament and this created continuity problems but praised new members for their high levels of education.

DEBATE AND PASSAGE OF TEMPORARY LAWS

3. (C) The Ambassador stressed his strong support for the bold steps taken by the GOJ regarding economic reform and hoped there would be speedy movement in the Parliament to ratify temporary laws related to the economy. Srour said he expected things to go the "right way", and highlighted that there is agreement in principle by many MPs to ratify most of the temporary laws. Some 35 temporary laws, he added, have been sent to committees for discussion. Although optimistic, he does expect some proposed amendments.

VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

4. (C) Srour advised that the Parliament will meet after August 6 to debate the new reshuffled government (refs b and c) and expected the deliberations to take 4-5 days. He viewed this development as a positive step and one which will allow MPs to express to the GOJ their views on the new government.

ISLAMIST MPs

5. (C) The Ambassador expressed interest in reaching out to all factions in the Parliament, particularly the Islamists. He emphasized the need to explain to them about the Embassy's programs and how they benefit Jordan. Srour encouraged the Ambassador to reach out to the Islamists. He described them as "difficult" people, while also characterizing some of them as politically well educated. Of the 17 Islamic Action Front (IAF) MPs, he classified 2-3 as particularly difficult and the rest as moderates. He said some are willing to talk and are not hard to deal with, and promised to encourage them to talk with Embassy officials.

JORDAN'S TWO HEADED SERPENT: OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND IRAQ

6. (C) On Iraq, the Ambassador told Srour that although things have moved slowly, progress is being made though not reported by the press. He said that most of our difficulties have been in an area north and west of Baghdad. The situation in the Shi'a south and in the north is much better. The challenge now for the U.S. is to find credible Sunni contacts. He stressed the U.S. wants the Governing Council to make the tough decisions. Srour hoped to see continued progress and linked reconstruction in Iraq to an improvement

in Jordan's economy. He believes that Jordan's unskilled and unemployed workers, which he estimated at between 60-70,000, would benefit if economic opportunities opened up in Iraq.

17. (C) On the peace process, the Ambassador stated how U.S.-Jordanian cooperation positively influenced the direction of policy on this issue. He also focused on the close relationship between President Bush and the King. President Bush, the Ambassador added, is committed to an independent Palestinian state and had pressed PM Sharon on settlements and the security fence. The Palestinians, the Ambassador concluded, must keep the peace and fight violence.

Srour emphasized how the Palestinian issue had a direct impact on Jordan's economy. If people don't believe or trust that there will be progress, he explained, they hold back on spending. If they see hope, they spend their money and strengthen the economy. He felt that both PM Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority, as well as PM Sharon, could do more to explain the delicate issues and highlight progress to give people hope.

U.S. - Jordanian relations

18. (C) The Ambassador again reiterated U.S. government support for the King's economic program and highlighted the U.S. aid provided to Jordan this year. Although the level of aid would not remain at the same level next year, Ambassador Gnehm explained, the U.S. would continue to support the King's economic programs so that Jordan's poor could benefit from economic progress.

19. (C) Srour expressed concern that American policy is not clear to many parliamentarians. He felt that their understanding is often based on what they read in the local media, thus their impressions are formed by what the media interprets as U.S. policy. He felt more could be done to improve this situation and encouraged the Ambassador to connect future visiting CODELS with MPs to establish a communication "bridge" between U.S. and Jordanian lawmakers. This would further help parliamentarians understand economic laws and how they relate to global issues.

GNEHM